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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 006028

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TAGS: PGOV PTER PREL PREF PHUM CO

SUBJECT: GOC SHOWS SOME FLEXIBILITY ON CEASEFIRE TERMS WITH
ELN

REF: BOGOTA 5789

Classified By: Political Counselor John S. Creamer.

Reasons: 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶11. (C) Summary: President Uribe showed some flexibility on possible ceasefire terms with the ELN, but said the group should sign a "base agreement" (acuerdo base) establishing a roadmap for the peace process at the next GOC-ELN talks set for August 20-24 in Havana. The GOC feels a sense of urgency to obtain the release of ELN kidnap victims and to lock in a ceasefire, but is willing to be patient on ELN disarmament. Civil society groups said the ELN has taken the political decision to make peace and urged the GOC to accept an ELN ceasefire proposal. The GOC remains wary of third party involvement in the talks, but accepted the ELN proposal that Cuba be a "witness" at the next round. End Summary

¶12. (U) President Uribe told a meeting of the National Peace Council on August 14 that to advance a peace process with the ELN, the GOC would allow the ELN to concentrate its forces in various points and accept verification of ELN members, identities by an international commission as part of a ceasefire accord. If ELN fronts did not feel comfortable with such arrangements, they could concentrate their forces in another country. Peace Commissioner Luis Carlos Restrepo said the GOC is prepared to sign a base agreement⁸ (acuerdo base) outlining the roadmap for the process at the next round of talks set for August 20-24 in Havana. He urged the ELN to do as well. Restrepo said that with the signing of the "base agreement," the ELN should free its kidnap victims and suspend further kidnappings. This would create a climate conducive to negotiation of the ceasefire terms, which could take as long as two months.

¶13. (U) Senate President Nancy Patricia Gutierrez also participated in the National Peace Council session, making public a letter to her from four U.S. Congressmen supporting her efforts to promote an ELN-GOC accord. Gutierrez and some members of the National Peace Council, which consists of civil society, labor, and academic leaders, will attend the next round of talks in Havana. In a separate event on the ELN-GOC process the same day, civil society groups urged the GOC to show flexibility on ceasefire terms. Several speakers said the ELN has made the political decision to make peace and called on the GOC to accept the ELN's proposal that its forces concentrate in several points with verification done by radio or other communications. Chief ELN negotiator Pedro Beltran welcomed the civil society forum and said the ELN is prepared to release its kidnap victims. Presidential

Communications Director Jorge Eastman told us the ELN has sent a similar message to President Uribe.

¶4. (C) The flurry of GOC and civil society activity appears designed to break the current impasse in the talks. GOC Deputy Peace Commissioner Dario Mejia told us August 10 that the July 14-19 talks stalled due to the ELN's failure to address ceasefire implementation and verification issues, as well as ELN insistence that a ceasefire should contain a political component (GOC commitment not to proceed with FTA ratification, implementation of National Development Plan, etc., because these were inconsistent with a peace process). Mejia said GOC expectations for the August meeting are realistic. The GOC will consider discussions on partial, humanitarian accords, such as joint demining operations or release of ELN kidnap victims in exchange for GOC release of ELN members serving time in prison, if agreement on a &base agreement⁸ is not possible.

¶5. (C) Mejia said the GOC envisions a three-part peace process involving: 1) signing of a "base agreement,⁸ release of ELN kidnap victims, and a ceasefire; 2) implementation of the "base agreement,⁸ including National Peace Council involvement and broader civil society participation, expansion of the ELN's Casa de Paz (peace house) to other cities, and implementation of programs for displaced persons and development projects in ELN areas; and 3) eventual ELN disarmament/demobilization and holding of the ELN's long sought National Convention. The GOC could be flexible on these elements, but the ELN must disarm before it could assume a full political role. Mejia said Uribe has told Restrepo the GOC wants to achieve a ceasefire and release of kidnap victims as soon as possible, but can be patient on disarmament. If the ELN needs to hold an ELN National

Congress to build internal consensus on a peace deal, the GOC is willing to help create the conditions needed for such an event.

¶6. (C) Mejia said the GOC insists on ELN concentration of forces during a ceasefire due to many ELN fronts' involvement in narcotrafficking and other criminal activities. If the GOC does not lock the ELN into fixed sites, it will grant it a free pass to continue criminal activity. Similarly, the GOC wants the ELN to identify its members, including urban fronts, to assure accountability for funds provided to the ELN, prevent narcotraffickers from infiltrating the process, and to lock the ELN into the process.

¶7. (C) Mejia said the GOC remains wary of a greater role for third parties in the talks. In an effort to pressure the ELN, the GOC has not authorized the European countries accompanying the process to make a financial payment to the ELN's Casa de Paz in Medellin or to support the negotiating table since April. The GOC continues to believe the participation of third parties, including the Europeans and "some U.S. sectors," would give the ELN the international recognition it craves at no cost. Still, he said the GOC has accepted an ELN proposal that Cuba be a &witness⁸ in the August 20-24 talks.

Nichols